

Matthew: On Earth As It Is In Heaven

The Not-So Triumphant Entry * Matthew 21:1-17

Please take your Bibles and turn with me to Matthew 21. Today we come to a rather momentous point in our study of the gospel of Matthew, a watershed event that in many ways is the beginning of the end of this great book. In fact, with today's passage we begin our study of the last week of Jesus' life. However, just to be clear, this does not mean we are almost finished with Matthew, because just like the other gospel writers, he spends a huge amount of time on the events that occur during this week. The great thing about this is that in the days ahead we are going to have the privilege of studying some of the most important events in history, including the institution of the Lord's Supper, Jesus' arrest, trial, crucifixion, and resurrection, and finally the giving of the Great Commission. So, we have some really great things to study in the days ahead, and to kick it all off, today we are going to start with what has historically been known as *The Triumphant Entry*, the event that we celebrate on Palm Sunday, the Sunday right before the Resurrection.

So, with that as an introduction, let's go ahead and read the passage, and to help set the context, we will actually start back in chapter 20, verse 29. This is a long section of Scripture so just hang in there with me.

And as they went out of Jericho, a great crowd followed him. [30] And behold, there were two blind men sitting by the roadside, and when they heard that Jesus was passing by, they cried out, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" [31] The crowd rebuked them, telling them to be silent, but they cried out all the more, "Lord, have mercy on us, Son of David!" [32] And stopping, Jesus called them and said, "What do you want me to do for you?" [33] They said to him, "Lord, let our eyes be opened." [34] And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed him. [1] Now when they drew near to Jerusalem and came to Bethphage, to the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, [2] saying to them, "Go into the village in front of you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Untie them and bring them to me. [3] If anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord needs them,' and he will send them at once." [4] This took place to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet, saying, [5] "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'" [6] The disciples went and did as Jesus had directed

them. [7] They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them. [8] Most of the crowd spread their cloaks on the road, and others cut branches from the trees and spread them on the road. [9] And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, "Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!" [10] And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?" [11] And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee." [12] And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. [13] He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers." [14] And the blind and the lame came to him in the temple, and he healed them. [15] But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, [16] and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" [17] And leaving them, he went out of the city to Bethany and lodged there. (Matthew 20:29-21:17 ESV)

Who is Jesus?

All right, while there are all kinds of things going on in this passage, the key to understanding it is found in v. 10. Look at it with me again:

And when he entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred up, saying, "Who is this?"

So, once again, Matthew is confronting us with the most important question of all time. Do you remember what it is? The most important question of all time is "who is Jesus?" And if right now you are wondering why Matthew is hitting us with this again, it's because we, even those of us who have been Christians for many years, even those of us who have been in church all of our lives, even those of us who have been studying Matthew for nearly two years, tend to get confused about who Jesus is. The truth is that we have an uncanny ability to make Jesus be who we want him to be, rather than who he truly is, and therefore just like believers in the first century we need the continual correction of God's Word. Listen, the most dangerous thing in the world is to misunderstand who Jesus is, and therefore we must go back to the Bible over and over again and allow it to form our understanding of his true identity.

All right, that being the case, let's talk about three things this passage teaches us about Jesus. You will note that in the context of this passage they have all to do with kingship. As we have seen numerous times, Matthew is the gospel of the king, and that focus is clearly in view in our passage today.

1. Jesus is a sovereign king.

First, note that Jesus is a sovereign king. One of the most obvious things in this passage is that Jesus is in control from beginning to end. We see this most notably in the way he orchestrates the events of his entry into Jerusalem. Matthew tells us that this happened to fulfill the prophecy found in Zechariah 9:9. Five hundred years before this event Zechariah had prophesied that when the Messiah finally came he would enter Jerusalem on a donkey, and here we see Jesus arranging events to make sure this happens. Somehow and somehow he organized things so that there would be a donkey for his disciples to find, while also assuring that the owner would be good with the disciples taking it. Now, we don't know how he did this, but the important point is that it was no accident or stroke of good luck, but rather something that Jesus planned a long time in advance.

What's more, v. 1 tells us that on his way to Jerusalem, Jesus stopped in Bethpage, which was right next to Bethany, the town where he had just recently raised his friend Lazarus from the dead. This is significant because Bethpage and Bethany were where Jesus would have had his most ardent supporters. These are the people who knew Lazarus and who had witnessed Jesus raising him from the dead. Many of these people would have been followers of Jesus. Now, do you get what this means? It means that Jesus is orchestrating his entrance into Jerusalem to gain as much attention and support as possible. He is intentionally allowing people to be whipped into a frenzy. You know, I think it's fairly common to think that the triumphal entry caught Jesus by surprise. That it was a spontaneous event that he just kind of went along with. However, that's clearly not the case. When we study this passage intently we can see that Jesus knew exactly what was going on, and had planned his entry into Jerusalem in the smallest of details.

Now, there is something else in this passage that proves Jesus is the sovereign king. Look at v. 12-13:

And Jesus entered the temple and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons. [13] He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you make it a den of robbers."

So, immediately following his triumphal entry, Jesus enters the temple and expels those who were using the worship of God for profit. The amazing thing about this is that Jesus didn't do so through his miraculous powers, but by the force of his person. He did so through his righteous indignation that the people would pervert the worship of the one true God for the sake of money. You might not understand the significance of what Jesus is doing here unless you know that there was a guard of soldiers at the temple at all times, and yet these men apparently stood by and watched Jesus go all Jack Bauer on the offending parties. Jesus stepped into the temple and took complete control, and no one did anything about it. Jesus proves here that not only does he control his own circumstances, but he also controls everyone else's circumstances as well.

Now, let's make some application here. What does this mean for us? Well, the fact that Jesus is the sovereign king should encourage us that not only is he in complete control of his own circumstances, but he is also in complete control of ours. What's more, Jesus always uses his control for our good. Some of us really need to hear this today. I know I hit on this fairly often, but I do so because we need to be continually reminded that it is true. And I know there are times when this is very hard to understand and even harder to believe, but one of the things this passage clearly shows us is that Jesus is always in control and he always uses his control for our good. Listen; do you know what Jesus' orchestration of these circumstances would eventually lead to? It would eventually lead to his crucifixion. We are going to see in a minute that what Jesus is really doing here is pushing the Jewish religious leaders to the breaking point. He's forcing their hand. He is orchestrating circumstances so that they will respond and condemn him to death. You see friends, the cross wasn't a tragic accident but rather something that was planned by God before time began and sovereignly carried out by the Father, Son and Holy Spirit to bring us – you and me – the ultimate good. And so here's the point. If Jesus can bring good out of the tragedy of the cross, he can and will bring good out of all the tragic circumstances we face in life. So, whatever you are going through right now, whatever circumstances you are struggling with, trust that Jesus is in control and he will use it for your good.

He is going to use them for your good both now and for all eternity.

2. Jesus is a humble king.

Ok, the second thing we learn about Jesus in this passage is that he is a humble king. Let's look at v. 5 again, which remember is a prophecy from the Old Testament book of Zechariah:

"Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your king is coming to you, humble, and mounted on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a beast of burden.'"

Now, there is a huge contradiction in this verse, and therefore a huge contradiction in the way Jesus enters Jerusalem. Unfortunately, most of the crowd missed the contradiction, and most of us do as well.

You see, the people thought that when the Messiah came he would establish his kingdom by force. They thought that he was going to enter Jerusalem, establish himself as king, and lead a political and military revolt against the Romans. So get this, the people were right in affirming Jesus as the Messiah, but they had a great misunderstanding of what kind of Messiah he was going to be. However, the clue to his Messiahship was right before them, not only in Old Testament prophecies but also in Jesus' actions.

If Jesus had wanted to proclaim himself as a political Messiah, he would have entered the city dressed in fine robes and mounted on a warhorse. He would have raised a bunch of money from his supporters and bought some really nice clothes and obtained the best horse that money could buy. Instead, he wore the only set of clothes he had – the clothes of a poor Galilean carpenter – and rode in on a donkey. A donkey! Now, while it was not unknown for a king to ride on a donkey, whenever one did so it was because he wanted to symbolize peace. If a king came riding into a city on a donkey, it meant that he came to bring peace, not war.

Now here's the point. Jesus is trying to show the people that his mission was completely different than they thought it was. He was trying to show them that he hadn't come to free them militarily but spiritually. He was trying to show them that their greatest need wasn't to be freed from the Romans, but to be freed from sin and restored to a relationship with God. That by the way, is what

Jesus was demonstrating with his cleansing of the temple. He was trying to point out to the people, and to the religious leaders specifically, that their biggest problem wasn't the Romans, but rather their broken relationship with God. And so instead of being a king who came in power, he was a king who came in weakness. A king who would establish his kingdom not through force, but through sacrifice. He was a king who would bring his people peace, but would do so not by taking life but by giving up his own.

Now, once again, let me point you to some application. It's pretty simple but extremely profound. We too need to come to the understanding that our greatest need isn't a physical one, but a spiritual one. Our greatest need isn't better health, it isn't more money, it isn't freedom from a bad marriage; our greatest need is to have our sins forgiven and to be restored to a relationship with the God who created us. Listen; if Jesus gave you good health or lots of money, or a new spouse, but didn't do anything about your sin, then you would still be all messed up. You'd still be in bondage. You'd still be separated from God and face an eternity in hell. You'd still have a huge problem, and lots of little problems to go along with it. No, Jesus didn't come to give you new health or a new job or a new bank account, but rather a new relationship. He came to restore you to the relationship with God that you were originally created to have. 1 Peter 3:18 is clear about this:

*For Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God.
(1 Peter 3:18 ESV)*

Let me press this a little further for those would claim to be believers. I am assuming that this is a great majority of the people in this room. As believers we need to realize that even though our sin has been forgiven and we have eternal life, our greatest need, by far, is still a spiritual one. For those of us who have a relationship with Jesus, our biggest need is a closer relationship with Jesus. Our greatest need is to know him more, to trust him more, and to grow to be like him more and more and more. You see, Jesus didn't just come to give us life, but to give it to us abundantly. One of my huge concerns for our church is that while many of us have eternal life there are a lot of us who aren't experiencing abundant life. We are not experiencing joy. We are not experiencing hope. We are not experiencing contentment. And I am convinced that the primary reason is that we think our greatest need is something physical – sex, money, a better

marriage, whatever – rather than a closer relationship with Jesus. And I could go on and on here, so let me just say this. Everything you are looking for can be found in and only in a relationship with Jesus. It can only be found by pursuing him. That's the only place that true joy, hope and contentment can be found. If you look for it anywhere else you are simply chasing after the wind. And so I want to urge you to stop focusing on the physical and to start giving your life to a relationship with Jesus.

3. Jesus is a confrontational king.

All right. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this story teaches that Jesus is a confrontational king.

As I mentioned earlier, in our text today Jesus orchestrates the events to bring things to a tipping point. Let me show you how he does this. First, he allows two blind men to identify him as the Son of David, the long awaited Messiah, the ultimate king, the final king of the world.¹ Now, this wasn't the first time that someone had done this, but every time prior to this Jesus had downplayed it. In fact on a couple of occasions he had even told people to stop telling everyone who he was. But now, when these blind men begin to call out, "Son of David!" instead of telling them to be quiet, Jesus affirms that this is who he is. So, do you see what's going on? For the first time Jesus is allowing his true identity to be known publicly. That's the first sign that he is being confrontational.

Second, look at how Jesus responds to the religious leaders in v. 15-16:

But when the chief priests and the scribes saw the wonderful things that he did, and the children crying out in the temple, "Hosanna to the Son of David!" they were indignant, and they said to him, "Do you hear what these are saying?" And Jesus said to them, "Yes; have you never read, "'Out of the mouth of infants and nursing babies you have prepared praise'?" (Matthew 21:15-16 ESV)

When the religious leaders ask Jesus why he is allowing the people to worship him, why in the world he is allowing them to call him the Messiah, he says, "Because it's true and therefore you just need to deal with it."

In other words, Jesus is sticking his finger in the religious leader's faces, the

¹ Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

people who could and would eventually have him killed and telling them, "This is who I am and I dare you to try and do something about it."

Third, everything about Jesus' entry into Jerusalem is confrontational. This might sound strange, but Jesus orchestrates the events in this story to draw the maximum amount of attention to himself as possible. In fact, v. 10 tells us that the whole city of Jerusalem was stirred up over him. The literal translation here is *seismic*. Jesus' entry caused an earthquake. And what is he trying to accomplish with this? Well, he's pushing everyone, and in particular the religious leaders, to a decision point. He wants them to make a decision on what they are going to do with him. As Tim Keller says, he wants everyone to decide whether they are going to crown him or kill him. Did you catch that? It's probably the most important point of this passage; Jesus is claiming to be the Messiah, the long-awaited, ultimate king of the world, and in doing so he is forcing everyone to make a choice, to decide whether or not they are going to accept him or reject him, whether or not they will crown him or kill him. That's what this story is about.

Are you beginning to see, by the way, why I have called this event the not-so triumphal entry? We know what choice most of these people make, right? Probably 99% or more of them choose to kill him, something they would accomplish in less than a week. Jesus picks a fight here, a fight that he is going to lose, so I'm not so sure *The Triumphal Entry* is exactly the right title for what's going on here.

Anyway, let's talk application one last time. And this is huge. I hope we can see that Jesus also forces us to crown him or kill him. In his Word he clearly displays who he is, and then he tells us that we have to deal with it. He tells us that we have to decide if we are going to crown him or kill him. Keller explains it like this:

*Jesus says, "Crown me. That's fine. Or kill me.Throw everything over and make me the supreme, absolute monarch of your life, or despise me, but I will not be liked. I won't be liked. Worship me. Kill me. Hate me. But don't like me. I won't let you like me. Crown me or kill me."*²

Now, here's the problem with what Keller is saying. What we really want is a third

² Keller, T. J. (2013). *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive*. New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church.

option. Instead of crowning him or killing him, we just want to like him. I mean, we certainly don't want to kill Jesus, but many of us don't want to submit to him either. We really just want him to be our friend.

You know what I'm talking about, right? In fact, I believe the church has somewhat propagated this idea. Somehow we have given people the notion that Jesus can be our savior – that he can be there to help when we are in trouble – but we don't have to submit to him as the king of our life. That he can be our “get out of jail free card” but we don't have to make any real commitment to him. That we can have eternal life and all the benefits that go along with it, and somehow not surrender ourselves completely to his kingship.

But friends, that's not how it works. Listen to me carefully here. Jesus does not give us the option of receiving him as our savior and not as our king. That option is not on the table. No, we either affirm Jesus as king and submit to all that that means, or we reject him as king and continue to serve ourselves. You see, to not to submit to Jesus is to reject him.

Listen; when it comes to Jesus, you cannot be ambivalent. You might think you can, but you cannot. If you don't submit to him as king, you are rejecting him. If you don't crown him, you are killing him. It's one or the other. So, here is the big question of the day; will you crown Jesus or will you kill him? Will you submit to him and follow him with all that you are or will you reject him and walk away? Please know that we all will make this choice today. Will you crown him or kill him? Which one will it be for you?

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